

Musgrave visits local Hospice

Congresswoman was in Wray last month to learn more and share experiences

No stranger to hospice, Representative Musgrave eagerly accepted the invitation extended by the Colorado Hospice Organization to visit a member hospice.

Upon arrival at the Wray Hospice of the Plains office, the afternoon of February 22, Congresswoman Musgrave warmly greeted the audience, offering hugs to those she had known for years and extending her hand acquainting herself to others. As the others arrived, Marilyn spoke to nurses regarding her fond memories of attending the Bible Camp offered by the American Sunday School Union at Beecher Island (where she eventually meet her husband), the pioneer spirit of her husband's family and ultimately the story of her brother, Ronnie's, final journey. As she shared her memories, she pondered, "I don't know why I am telling you my life story. I guess it is because you are hospice." We nodded knowingly. Clearly, she understands the hospice concept of care.

As she addressed the group, the Congresswoman spoke passionately about her experiences with hospice. She stated that hospice had cared for her cousin, her best friend's father, and most recently, her brother. She fondly spoke of her brother, Ronnie, describing him as a rock hound. Ronnie knew that she liked turquoise and other stones. As her voice trembled and eyes filled with tears, she said, "Even as he lay dying, he instructed his wife, Martha, to change the sand in the tumbler to finish the rocks."

After sharing her memories, she reiterated the importance of hospice, verbalizing the support Ronnie and his family received while in the in-patient unit of Hospice and Palliative Care of Northern Colorado. The Congresswoman addressed the volunteers and thanked them for their valued assistance. She expressed her appreciation for all that they

do, affirming that volunteers are the backbone of hospice. Her appreciation was extended to the staff, noting that she truly believes, "that hospice is a calling, rather than a job." Representative Musgrave repeatedly stated, "The work you do is invaluable."

Turning her attention to the audience, she welcomed comments. Hospice Volunteer and Board Member, Pat Covert, expressed her appreciation to the Congresswoman for taking the time to visit hospice.

Jim Coulter was the next to share his thoughts. He recalled that he first came to know and understand Hospice in 1998, when his wife, Ellen succumbed to breast cancer after battling the disease for fifteen years. He concluded, "I commit my support to Hospice of the Plains and to every Hospice for what it does, and I pray that every person including our leaders never forget that dying should not be about being alone or suffering."

Equally as somber, Don Jensen told of his hospice experience in September 1990, when his first wife, Lorraine, was dying in Loveland. He recalled the assistance his wife and he received at their home in Loveland from Hospice of Larimer County. When Don moved back to his hometown, Wray, in August 1996, he was delighted to learn that Hospice of the Plains was seeking volunteers. He attended the Hospice Volunteer Training and remains an active Hospice Volunteer. He proudly stated, "I am their oldest Hospice Volunteer. And, I continue to operate Ham Radio," showing the Congresswoman his call letters on his cap.

The Congresswoman listened intently as Eunice Weed continued with the legacy of Hospice of the Plains. Eunice explained that

when her husband died of cancer in 1985, she could have used some help, but Hospice was not available to her at that time. Although they had family nearby at the time, she reflected that she believes they were scared. It was then that she vowed to become a Hospice Volunteer, doing so when the first volunteer training was held.

Hospice of the Plains Administrator Donna Roberts informed the Congresswoman and other guests that USDA-Rural Development, under Cheryl's supervision, has been very kind to Hospice through the years. USDA-Rural Development community grants enabled Hospice to purchase computer equipment, the 24X30 foot storage building at the rear of the property, and combined with the generosity of the local Kitzmiller-Bales Trust, provided monies to purchase office furniture. She added her thanks to the Wray Community District Hospital Board of Directors and Ed Finley, CEO for generously providing office space, telephone and internet service, and for allowing Hospice to construct a storage building on the hospital's property.

Prior to her departure, Congresswoman Musgrave asked for additional information regarding the challenges she had heard earlier. Appreciatively, Rod and Donna provided her with facts, figures and thoughts to ponder.

Lastly, Congresswoman Musgrave, reiterated her appreciation for the experience and expressed her commitment to ensure other Congressional leaders hear Hospice stories.